

HISTORY OF JASPER COUNTY.

(From *The History of Jasper County, Iowa* (1878))

ON FOOT INTO THE WILDERNESS.

On the 23d day of April, 1843, seven days before white men were allowed to mark out or drive stakes for claims in the "New Purchase," Adam M. Tool, William Highland, John Frost and John Vance, accompanied by three others, left their families in Jefferson County, in this State [sic], in search of lands for future homes. They traveled on foot, carrying ten days' provisions and their blankets on their backs. They proceeded along up the south side of the Skunk River timber a distance of eighty miles, having parted by the way with their three companions, who are left anonymous in this narrative.

On the night of the 28th, the four remaining prospectors encamped in the point of the timber in which the town of Monroe is now located. The following day, they traveled southward to the timber again and halted to rest at Dick Parker's trading post at the red rocks of the Des Moines, which, by the bye, was the only house lying directly west of Jefferson County. Here they met the steamer *Ione*, which was slowly making its way up the Des Moines, having on board a company of infantry, commanded by Captain Allen, to whom had been intrusted [sic] the duty of building barracks at the Raccoon Forks. On board, also, was the heavy baggage of a company of dragoons, which, about the same time, started for the forks of the Des Moines by way of Iowa City.

The four men then started southeastward again, intending to stay all night with a squatter named Mosier, in the "Narrows," near where Oskaloosa now stands, but, toward nightfall, were overtaken by a cold, drenching rain, in which they walked laboriously along the Indian trail till late in the night, finally reaching their intended place of refuge, badly jaded.

In the morning, a council was held, at which time Adam Tool expressed himself considerably disgusted with his experience of the night before, and talked strongly of returning to Jefferson County and buying a claim there. They had been told on the way, probably by Parker, that the New Purchase would not be settled for twenty years, and it is probable that he had the "blues." Highland said at this interview that he did not quite fancy the country they had visited, but that he was going back to take a claim there, fearing he might do worse. After a protracted consultation, it was agreed to make their homes at the point of timber where they had encamped on the night of the 27th. Frost and Vance were now quite footsore, and it was agreed that they should remain at the "Narrows" until they were met by the wagon that was to start on the 1st of May with provisions, axes and other implements. Accordingly, the two older men, Tool and Highland, left their companions, and on the evening of the 30th, they arrived at Skunk Bottom, near their camping place of the 27th.

The next morning (Monday), was the anxiously expected 1st of May, a day hailed with joy and long to be remembered by thousands, who were now enabled, under the Territorial laws, to secure desirable homes for themselves and families.

The next morning, the two arose early, and by the time the light of the sun had fully dispelled the shades of night, with tomahawk in hand, they began the work of blazing and staking their claims, Highland blazing, and Tool driving the stakes. They completed their rough survey of two claims on that day, and the other two on the following day.

On the fourth morning of their stay, they ate the last of their little stock of provisions, but the same evening, their hearts were gladdened and their appetites relieved by the arrival of the wagon, which was driven by James A. Tool, the son, and Washington Fleenor, the son-in-law of Tool, who were accompanied by Frost and Vance.

Fleenor and James A. Tool selected claims along the east side of the four previously staked out. These claims were composed of about equal parts of timber and prairie, and were to contain 320 acres. The prairie embraced in them lay along the south side of the timber.

It was agreed that inasmuch as the two older men had done more foot-travel and the work of marking out the claims, they should have the first selections. Mr. Highland said that, as Mr. Tool was the oldest in the company, he should make the first choice. Tool thereupon took the one farthest west, at the head or point of the grove. Highland took the third one toward the east, and Frost and Vance drew "cuts" for the other two, Vance's lot falling between Tool and Highland.

The next measure taken was, of course, to provide cabins for their families left behind in Jefferson County. The law as well as their own needs, was imperative in this respect, for it required settlers to build their houses within thirty days after taking their claims.

The six men named above joined together in this work, and were able to erect about one cabin a day up to the square, or rafter-plate. Highland's was the first one built, a part of which may be seen standing to this day [1878], fifty yards in the rear of his present and more commodious dwelling. This was the first building erected by white men in Jasper County. Soon after accomplishing their task the men returned to their families.



Highland Cabin, built in 1843. Photo by J. R. Hall, Monroe, Iowa.
(Jasper County Historical Society - Bea Molleck Collection)